

## *Exactness in Our Discipleship*

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I am grateful and humbled to be with you here this morning. During my time here at BYU I have had the opportunity to listen to numerous devotional addresses, and, frankly, I have never considered myself to be in the category of those who deliver these addresses. So I pray that I may be able to speak through the Spirit today and deliver a message that will be worthwhile to you.

Let me begin by talking for a minute about my professional work. My discipline of training is in the area of acoustics, and for much of my career I have been involved with research on what is referred to as active noise control. With this technology you can in essence cancel noise with noise. Sound waves are created in the air as molecules oscillate, thereby making the pressure in the air oscillate up and down.

We can represent this oscillating pressure graphically with peaks on the graph representing points in time when the pressure is high and dips representing points in time when the pressure is low. Our ears detect this oscillating pressure and perceive it as sound. Another important concept is that multiple waves can add together—much as numbers add together. So if one sound wave makes the pressure in the air go up and a second sound wave makes the pressure in the air go down by the same

amount, the two waves will add like positive and negative numbers and cancel each other, thereby eliminating the sound.

On a graph, we could show three sounds where the upper line would schematically represent the oscillating pressure that exists before we decide we want to cancel it. The middle line on the graph would represent the pressure that we are going to create by turning our control on to try to cancel the original sound. With the control turned on, the middle line would represent a wave that is close to being the mirror opposite of the original sound wave, which should lead to significant cancellation. The bottom line would show the result of our effort, as the amplitude, or height, of the sound wave goes down noticeably—thus we would expect an audible difference.

In my first example we were not able to completely cancel the original sound. This is because we did not create a completely exact mirror image of the original sound. The middle line on the graph would have what we call a “phase error.” This means that the peaks of one wave do not line up exactly in time with

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the dips in the other wave. This time relation of one point on a wave to another point on the wave is referred to as *phase*. As you follow the oscillation through a complete cycle from a peak through a dip and back to the next peak, that is represented by a change in phase of 360 degrees, analogous to going around a circle. The ideal phase of our cancelling wave for active control is 180 degrees, as that would exactly line up the peaks of the original wave with the dips of our control wave. In my first example we were off by 5 degrees of phase from the ideal of 180 degrees.

What if we are a little sloppier? My second example shows a similar result, but in this result we are even less careful and we have a phase error of 45 degrees. In this case the results do not appear to be nearly as impressive, though the 45-degree phase error still appears to produce a cancelling wave that is close to what we want. As you heard in my second example, this result was not very impressive, and you would be highly unlikely to invest significantly in this technology if this result was the best that could be obtained.

Let's look at one last example. In this case we have been careful and have reduced the phase error to half a degree, which is quite close to the perfect solution. As a result, in this example the sound is essentially completely cancelled. If you were in business, this represents a result you might be much more willing to invest in.

Well, at this point I suspect many of you are thinking, "I thought I was attending a devotional and not one of those dreaded physics classes." Let me assure you that you can relax—we are pretty much finished with the physics lecture. Just why have I taken the time to explain all this to you? In my mind there is a strong analogy that can be drawn from these active noise control results we have heard and our discipleship of the Savior. As we become exact in getting the right phase for implementing active noise control, the results become

very impressive. Similarly, as we become more exact in our discipleship of the Savior, there is an impressive power that comes into our lives that aids us in our spiritual growth. As we look at people we may be acquainted with, as well as individuals in the scriptures, I am sure that we can identify numerous examples representing various levels of commitment in our discipleship.

Consider one of the earliest examples that we have record of. Adam and Eve had two sons: Cain and Abel. They were commanded to make offerings unto the Lord:

*And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.*

*And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:*

*But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. [Genesis 4:3–5]*

You know the ending of this tragic story from there.

But what was it that led the Lord to accept Abel's offering and not accept Cain's offering? Didn't they both give offerings as they were commanded? We gain additional insight to this question from the Pearl of Great Price. When Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, they were commanded "that they should . . . offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord" (Moses 5:5). In this sense Cain was close to doing what he had been commanded, having brought of the fruit of the ground, but he wasn't exact in following the commandment given. Furthermore, we find that "Satan commanded [Cain], saying: Make an offering unto the Lord" (Moses 5:18), after which Cain made his offering. Thus Cain was sort of doing the right thing, but for all the wrong reasons, as he was really following Satan rather than the Savior.

Let's move forward to the New Testament. After the Resurrection of the Savior, we find the Saints striving to live the law of consecration, having implemented a form of the united order. In the book of Acts we read of Ananias and his wife, who sold one of their possessions. They then proceeded to almost live the law of consecration by bringing a portion of the money they received to the Apostles; however, they kept back a portion of it for themselves. We read of how Peter through the Spirit detected their dishonesty, first on the part of Ananias and then later with his wife. Both were stricken and died as a result of not being completely honest in their offering to the Lord (see Acts 5:1–10).

Examples are not restricted to the Old World. Let's move to the Book of Mormon record. We find Lehi and his family leaving Jerusalem, only to receive direction from the Lord that they should return to get the brass plates. You know how Laman and Lemuel grumbled. Sam and Nephi were much more willing to follow the commandments of the Lord. In spite of this, Laman and Lemuel sort of followed the commandment in that they did go up to Jerusalem with Nephi. As you recall, Laman first went in to Laban to request the plates. However, Laban became angry, thrust Laman out, and tried to kill him. Nephi was successful in persuading his brothers to return with him to try again. This time they essentially offered to buy the plates from Laban. Laban thrust them out again, and their riches fell into the hands of Laban. (See 1 Nephi 1–3.)

At this point Laman and Lemuel had had enough. I can almost hear them saying to Nephi, "Look, this was completely crazy to have us come back here to get these useless plates. The Lord can't really expect us to do this. It's time for us to clear out of here and at least save our lives." They even said to Nephi, "How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands?" (1 Nephi 3:31).

However, we read of the commitment of Nephi as he replied, "Let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord" (1 Nephi 4:1). As you know, Nephi went back to Jerusalem, where he "was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do" (1 Nephi 4:6). Laman and Lemuel sort of followed the commandments they had received, but not precisely, and as a result missed out on the blessings that came to Nephi because of his commitment to do all that the Lord commanded.

We have another example in the two thousand stripling warriors who Helaman led into battle. These young men were described as "men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted" (Alma 53:20). The Nephite army marveled that not a single one of these young men was killed. In explaining this miracle, Helaman observed:

*Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them; and I did remember the words which they said unto me that their mothers had taught them. [Alma 57:21]*

There is a principle we can learn from these examples in the scriptures. As we are obedient and try to follow the direction we receive from the Lord to the best of our ability, we are blessed and receive further spiritual insights and strength to live the gospel. The Lord put it this way:

*For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that*

which they have. [2 Nephi 28:30; emphasis added]

Or, put another way:

*It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. [Alma 12:9; emphasis added]*

So how does this correspond to our everyday lives? Let me illustrate with a personal example. You may recall that one year ago we received some guidance from our living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. In the August 2005 *Ensign*, as part of the First Presidency message, he said:

*We studied the Book of Mormon in Sunday School this past year. Nonetheless I offer a challenge to members of the Church throughout the world and to our friends everywhere to read or reread the Book of Mormon. If you will read a bit more than one and one-half chapters a day, you will be able to finish the book before the end of this year. . . .*

*Without reservation I promise you that if each of you will observe this simple program, regardless of how many times you previously may have read the Book of Mormon, there will come into your lives and into your homes an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord, a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to His commandments, and a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God. [Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Testimony Vibrant and True, *Ensign*, August 2005, 5–6]*

I am sure you remember this challenge. How did you respond to it? Let me tell you of my experience. I remember that when the challenge came out, I was going strong with a personal study of the Doctrine and Covenants. I remember distinctly going through a thought

process something like “I’m doing really well with my Doctrine and Covenants study right now. I’ve read the Book of Mormon many times, and, if I read it now before the end of the year, it will take enough time that I know it will mess up my current study. Maybe I can come back early next year and study the Book of Mormon.” Do you see the fallacy of my reasoning? I was sort of being a disciple of Christ and more or less striving to live the gospel, but I wasn’t following the counsel received through His prophet with exactness. I was rationalizing, saying I had read the Book of Mormon many times, when a prophet of God had said, “Regardless of how many times you previously may have read the Book of Mormon, there will come into your lives and into your homes an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord.”

After a few days of fighting this challenge, it finally sunk into me that I had been asked by a prophet to do something, and it was time to stop moaning about my Doctrine and Covenants study and get with the program. So I did start studying the Book of Mormon, and some interesting things happened in our family. My wife, who is always ahead of me in spiritual things, had already embraced the challenge and was studying the Book of Mormon. As we went forward accepting this challenge, we noticed that each of our five children, without any urging from us, had also accepted the challenge, and each was regularly studying the Book of Mormon. One or two of our children had a nontraditional New Year’s Eve last year as they finished up the last few chapters, but each member of our family was able to finish reading the Book of Mormon, including our youngest son, who finished a personal reading of the entire book for the first time. That in and of itself was enough blessing for me as a father, but I also observed, as President Hinckley had promised, that an added measure of the Spirit came into our home, and my testimony of Jesus Christ and His gospel was strengthened.

There is a difference in our spiritual strength that results when we are actively striving to live the gospel to the best of our ability. It is often seemingly small things that can make such a difference in our lives. I recall another experience I had while serving as a bishop. I had felt impressed that there were some things we needed to be aware of and to work on to help strengthen the youth in our ward. In a combined priesthood/Relief Society meeting I outlined some of my concerns and feelings regarding what I felt we needed to do as a ward. A discussion period followed, and I remember one brother in my ward who raised his hand and said, "Bishop, if this is what you feel we need to do as a ward, I want you to know that I support it and will do whatever I can." How gratifying that was to see this member committed to following the counsel he had received. That type of commitment to do whatever the Lord asks of us generates a spiritual strength and awareness that will bring us closer to the Savior and help us to continue to progress in our lives.

Contrast this with an experience an elders quorum president had. He told me he had felt inspired to challenge his elders quorum to do some specific things to prepare for general conference. He met with his quorum and outlined several things he wanted them to do before, during, and after conference and promised them that if they would follow his counsel, they would have a spiritually uplifting and enlightening experience. He presented his proposal to the quorum as a priesthood assignment and indicated he would ask for feedback after conference. He told me that after general conference he asked for a report from his quorum members. What was the result? Two people, one of whom was himself, had accepted the assignment, and both had a wonderful and rewarding experience while listening to conference. A number of others reported that they had gone home and simply thrown the assignment into the garbage. Think of the blessings

that were forfeited by those who decided that it was not important to be exact in their discipleship of the Savior and to follow counsel and direction received through priesthood leaders.

I think I am safe in saying that all of us look to our living prophet as one who is fully committed to following the Savior. As we look at the life of President Hinckley, we see abundant evidence of him deciding at an early age that he would do all that was asked of him by the Lord. He tells the story about a time during his mission in England when three or four of the London papers carried some negative reviews of a reprint of an old book purporting to be a history of the Mormons.

His mission president said to then Elder Hinckley, "I want you to go down to the publisher and protest this."

Elder Hinckley was about to say, "Surely not me," but instead meekly said, "Yes, sir."

President Hinckley talked about the fear that he felt, but he offered a prayer and then, with stomach churning, went down to meet with the president of the publishing company. He presented his card to the receptionist, who took it into the inner office and then returned to indicate that the president was too busy to meet with him. Elder Hinckley replied that he had come five thousand miles and would wait. Over the next hour the receptionist went into the office several times and then finally invited Elder Hinckley in. As he entered, he noticed that the president was smoking a long cigar and had a look that seemed to say, "Don't bother me."

President Hinckley doesn't recall what he said, but another power seemed to speak through him. At first the company president was defensive and belligerent. Then he began to soften. By the end of their conversation he promised to do something, and he sent word out to every book dealer in England to return the books to the publisher. At great expense he printed in the front of each volume a statement to the effect that the book was not to

be considered as history but only as fiction. President Hinckley concluded his telling of this story by saying, “I came to know that when we try in faith to walk in obedience to the requests of the priesthood, the Lord opens the way, even when there appears to be no way” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “If Ye Be Willing and Obedient,” *Ensign*, July 1995, 5).

Many times, the difference between being fully committed to the gospel and being sort of committed to the gospel can be fairly small, just as the differences were small in our active noise control examples. Nonetheless, these differences can result in a huge contrast. With the Liahona, Lehi and his family had a visual indicator of how they were doing. Nephi observed:

*The pointers . . . did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which [they] did give unto them.*

*And there was also written upon them a new writing . . . ; and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which [they] gave unto it. And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things. [1 Nephi 16:28–29]*

We have various Liahonas in our lives today. Are we being diligent in giving heed to them? Are we faithfully studying the scriptures as we have been counseled to do? Do we earnestly strive to follow the guidance we receive from our living prophets, our stake president, bishop, elders quorum president, Relief Society president, and other Church leaders? Are we striving to be as exact as we can in our discipleship of the Savior? In doing this, we need to be aware that we are not perfect and we will not be perfect anytime soon. As King Benjamin counseled his people, “It is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize” (Mosiah 4:27). We need to maintain a balance in our lives between being able to accept ourselves with our weaknesses and current limita-

tions and being committed to progressing and becoming more exact disciples of the Savior. If you recall, the phase matching of the control wave in the last active noise control example was still not completely exact. Nonetheless, as the match becomes closer and closer, the results become more and more impressive. So it is with our spiritual lives.

There is one other concept that I would like to mention briefly. Going back to my active noise control analogy, if things get out of alignment with our control system, we can lose the control effect we are striving for. To deal with this problem, we generally use digital control systems that are adaptive in nature and can correct for those errors that may creep in over time. This is not unlike our spiritual lives. Due to our mortal natures, we do things in our lives that can degrade our spiritual strength. Uncorrected, this will lead to spiritual illness and eventually spiritual death. So how do we correct for these spiritual errors as we go through our lives? The answer, of course, is repentance, but I want to emphasize that we need repentance that is centered on the Savior. If we make mistakes in our lives, we can sometimes correct them on our own—but, generally, it is the hard way to do it. The Savior offered a much easier and more effective way when He said:

*And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. [Ether 12:27; emphasis added]*

Although it may be difficult for us to completely understand the inner workings of the Atonement of the Savior, we nonetheless know everything we need to know to be recipients of its power. The Atonement brings an enabling power into our lives—cleansing us,

strengthening us, and buoying us up through the challenges of life that would derail us from the path we are striving to follow. The Atonement is not only important if we have committed a major transgression. It is also there to strengthen us in all aspects of our lives.

In speaking of the coming of Jesus Christ, Alma taught his people:

*And [Christ] shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.*

*And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. [Alma 7:11–12]*

The Savior understands you and He understands me. He knows the challenges we face and understands our feelings when we get down because life isn't going as well as we would like it to. These things can often be precursors to straying off from the path that we are striving to follow, but as we focus on the Savior and His Atonement, He can succor us, buoy us up, and give us strength and resolve to do what we should.

Nephi was one of the great prophets of the Book of Mormon. But it is apparent that life got him down on occasion as well. Shortly after the death of Lehi, Nephi was struggling some with life—Laman and Lemuel were yet again angry with him, and perhaps he was still feeling the loss of his father, Lehi. In this frame of mind, he wrote:

*My heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.*

*I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me.*

*And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. [2 Nephi 4:17–19]*

Now, I don't know about you, but I have a difficult time believing that Nephi was talking about any sins here that we might categorize as being major. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if the sins he was referring to were his frustration with his bullheaded brothers and perhaps feelings of wanting to beat them over the head with a two-by-four. Whatever the case, there is a great lesson that we can learn from Nephi as he dealt with these feelings in going to the Lord. As he prayed, he said:

*O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin? . . .*

*O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! . . . Wilt thou make my path straight before me! . . .*

*O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. [2 Nephi 4:31, 33–34]*

Through his desire to be fully committed and exact in his discipleship, Nephi received strength to move forward and be the person our Father in Heaven wanted him to be. So can it be with us.

As Moroni finished the Book of Mormon, his last words of counsel for each of us were:

*Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ. . . .*

*And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through*

*the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.* [Moroni 10:32–33]

May each of us follow this counsel to come unto Christ, to be His disciples with all our might, mind, and strength and thereby enjoy the sanctifying power of the Atonement in our

lives. I know through a personal witness of the Spirit that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He was resurrected, and that He lives today. Because of His love for us, He carried out the Atonement for me and for you, making it possible for each of us to return to our Father in Heaven as we become the disciples He would have us be. Of this I bear testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.